

JOHN CARLO MANIGAULTE, PH. D.

July 15, 2006

Howard J. White, Associate Vice-President for Affirmative Action
Long Island University - Office of Personnel and Labor Relations
University Center - 700 Northern Blvd.
Brookville, New York 11548-1327

Dear Mr. White:

Thank you for your letter dated June 7, 2006 wherein you address, in general terms, policies and programs to accommodate employees with disabilities. My question was, indeed, open-ended and difficult for *anyone* to answer, but you nevertheless provided me with a clear overview of the College's position and federal law—both designed to assist minorities and those with disabilities.

I am proud that Long Island University is working hard “to promote diversity throughout the university,” as you duly noted in your letter. I don't believe that I have met you, but I *do* admire your position (and the courage that it takes to defend it from time to time). C. W. Post seems to attract students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Whether we keep them or not is another matter. Too many of my favorite students, however, have been confiding to me that they are transferring, for a variety of reasons.

As an Afro-American educator, I can say that I've been proud to teach at C. W. Post (since 1999, mind you). For the most part, my students have loved me dearly and said so. I've not been a “push-over” who dispenses easy A's like a politician tossing out handshakes to get re-elected. Instead, I've challenged my students with difficult tests, exercises, etc. A few rather boisterous students have complained to administrators about my very, very tough attendance policy and the challenging exams I offer them.

For the most part, however, the majority of my students have thanked me profusely for teaching them to be self-disciplined and to work hard.

Students with disabilities have cried in my presence, thanking me for admitting to the entire class that I, too, have a disability but was able to earn a Ph.D. In this regard, I have become a role model that one might liken to a two-edged sword: I am a somewhat successful Afro-American educator (I don't have a full-time job yet) and I am a successful *teacher* who just happens to have a learning disability.

July 15, 2006

Because of my disability, I have learned a few things that they simply don't (or cannot) teach you in teachers' colleges all across America. I've learned to systematize my life. I've learned to constantly test, retest, and alter my teaching strategies so that I can become more and more effective in the classroom.

As you can see by the enclosed class observations, my immediate supervisors have been duly impressed with my work. Over the years, I've received sterling class observations at different institutions. Even so, I continually work to improve my performance. I have enclosed a DVD produced by three of my students; they did it as an extra-credit project. They thoroughly enjoyed the class and I believe that they learned a lot. You can see for yourself. Just plug it into a DVD player and hit "play."

Now, to the substance of my complaint:

Several months ago, I met with Belinda Kremer, Director of the Writing Program here at Post. We met for about an hour to discuss my work at Post. Unfortunately, Ms. Kremer chose not to recommend me for future adjunct positions after our brief meeting, even though she never visited my class (not once!), even though she never asked about presentations and other requirements that I use to modernize the curricula.

During our one-hour meeting (*which Ms. Kremer thought to be quite extensive*), she insisted that I completely overhaul my teaching strategies. She insisted that I model myself after a pedagogical formula that I simply cannot follow (mainly because of my learning disability and partly because I don't really believe in a "one-size-fits-all" approach). I rather painfully informed Ms. Kremer that I have a learning disability. "One size" does not "fit all." She apparently ignored me and my disability, perhaps believing that anyone who could earn a Ph.D. must have somehow dispensed with all difficulties relevant to functioning effectively in the workplace. She doesn't appear to realize that I function well *because* I use a unique system, one that I developed after years of testing and retesting various pedagogical strategies!

In a nutshell, then: Ms. Kremer suggested more "discussions" in the classroom. For me to do so would invite absolute and total disaster. Her pedagogical strategies would sap the life out of me and render me useless, ineffective—a major headache for my students! I have attention deficit concerns. I am too easily led off course!

Among several challenges that I face is ADHD. I simply cannot focus and teach effectively if I don't carefully regulate what occurs in my classroom. Over the years I have learned to balance individual work with carefully regulated class discussion. I've learned to provide and grade individual work so that my students put forth their best efforts, so that they take seriously the work that I've carefully designed for

them. From one day to the next I keep them concentrating on their work, which keeps me focused and concentrating on my objectives.

That's the way I've evolved to teach over the years.

I've been very successful with the majority of my students. The few who rarely come to class and who do poorly on my pre-writing exercises have complained bitterly to my superiors. Today's students know "the ropes," they know how to "rock the boat" so that their concerns are more than adequately addressed. Some expect to write a great paper (out of class, mind you) to pass my course. It doesn't work that way because I *insist* that my students write and pass *in-class* essays. I want to see their progress step-by-step. I want to make sure that each and every student is doing his or her own work. Enough with Internet papers! Enough of that "collaborative writing," which drives someone with ADHD complete berserk.

Those who work hard in my class(es) have discovered that my pre-writing exercises encourage them to do much more serious thinking than they've done before. My students have said so and I've got the proof! I've kept their written comments about the exercises I have had them do in class. This is how I teach: I get constant feedback from students as well as from assessment instruments that I use with great frequency throughout the semester. I've designed prewriting exercises that simultaneously challenge my students with individual work and enable me to "recharge my mental batteries" so that I can maintain pedagogical focus throughout the period.

There is, indeed, a specific "method in my madness." It's outlined on my syllabus and during the first week of classes I tell my students what "they're in for." Those who prefer another style of pedagogy can quickly transfer into another class. Those who cannot transfer into another class (for a variety of reasons) can work with me individually to improve their grades, if they do poorly on various assessment instruments. I allow for many extra-credit assignments. The enclosed DVD is just one example! There simply is no excuse for not doing well in my class (if students are willing to work hard).

Ms. Kremer, however, could not understand my needs and insisted during our very last meeting that I completely retool my teaching strategies. She scoffed at my prewriting exercises and suggested that I virtually eliminate course credit for doing such exercises. She insisted that I retool my grading chart to reflect a system that grades one or two "serious" papers. I wondered how she could be so sure that her students were actually writing the papers they submitted to her. She responded that we simply have to "trust them."

July 15, 2006

Unfortunately, I cannot comply with her wishes. I love my students and I trust them—to a certain extent. Unfortunately, we live in a “if I can get away with it world, I will.” Too many of my students have admitted to me (in private) that if they could get away with “extra-help,” they would. With all of the “collaborative writing” going on in classes all across America, what does it really mean to do your own work? This is just one of many questions I was asked by decent, thoughtful students. After all, they’re just trying to be being practical.

In a nutshell then: I am incapable of functioning in the manner Ms. Kremer demands. It seems that I will not be rehired because of Ms. Kremer’s insensitivity to real-world disabilities.

I’ve known that I’ve had a learning disability since it was diagnosed in middle school, quite a few decades ago. If the College is willing to pay for it, I’ll gladly undergo more testing to see the extent of this disability today. I don’t want anyone to have to accept on faith my claims. I’ve been quite successful over the years because I’ve developed a system that works for me and my students (and, *especially*, for students with disabilities who have come to me for the special help that successful people with disabilities can offer others with disabilities). Has it been “easy as baking a cake?” No. There are always a few rough spots that need to be ironed out. I am, perhaps, pretty tough on my LD students because I know how hard it’s going to be for them to succeed in a world that too often ignores their special needs!

I strongly believe that *thoughtful* people can surmise quite a bit about how others must struggle to survive in a challenging world. Ms. Kremer, unfortunately, is not a very thoughtful person. She appears (at least to me she appears this way) to be unwilling to make reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities.

If you are able to intercede in my behalf or offer helpful advice, please to not hesitate to contact me or do what you can “behind the scenes” to ameliorate this “situation.” I am struggling to put food on the table and pay my bills, just like many other professionals out there. As an Afro-American, let me tell you that I don’t believe prejudice is a thing of the past, just because Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell have made it to the White House—and not as traditional “house servants” or “gardeners” (thank God!).

Furthermore, let me add that it’s hard to survive in this world when you’ve got a learning or “functional” disability. It’s even harder when your immediate supervisor turns a deaf ear to your challenges and suggests that you be “fired” or “not rehired” (which really amounts to the just about the same thing, in practical terms). As you indicated to me in your very thoughtful letter, *university policy insists on fair treatment for those with disabilities!* Moreover, I suspect that C. W. Post might want to keep as many professors of color as possible, given our rather low numbers in the “marketplace” and our

- 5 -

July 15, 2006

special ability to "connect" with multicultural students. Needless to say, any decent teacher would care as much for his (or her) "traditional" students as "multicultural" students.

Sincere appreciation for your time, your efforts, and your inestimable patience! God bless you!!!

Sincerely,

John Carlo Manigaulte

Adjunct Professor of English



P.S. - I am sending a copy of this letter to my Chair (the very talented and honorable Edmund Miller). He has written beautiful poetry and he is by every measure a very thoughtful person. I am sure he is somewhat puzzled by Ms. Kremer, a woman who appears very capable of holding an outrageous grudge against someone she thinks is "just being stubborn." But I'm not "just being stubborn," I'm disabled. I haven't really advertised this disability except of late. Perhaps that's why she is so skeptical. I don't really know.

Would you kindly send the enclosed DVD to Edmund after you've viewed it (if that's what you would like to do)? I would greatly appreciate such assistance. Edmund, too, should see some of the "extra things" students are doing in my classes. I'm sure he would be roundly impressed (as he has always been with my work).

If there is a full-time job (or a decent-paying part-time job) helping students with disabilities (or some such position), please do consider me for it? I really don't mind shifting gears and working in some sort of "support function." As I indicated earlier, I have to pay my bills just like anyone else out there!